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Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6940th meeting
Monday, 25 March 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Churkin	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Bouchaara
	Pakistan	Mr. Tarar
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Rwanda	Mr. Gasana
	Togo	Mr. Afande
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: As the peoples of the Middle East face a period of extraordinary challenges and turmoil, establishing the groundwork necessary for a credible Israeli-Palestinian peace process remains a core priority for the United Nations. President Obama's visit to the region last week marked an important opportunity to reinvigorate efforts towards a two-State solution. President Obama met with leaders on both sides. He also visited His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan, who has been central to recent dialogue initiatives. In a direct follow-up to the visit, the United States Secretary of State Mr. John Kerry met with President Abbas in Amman and returned to Jerusalem to meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The United Nations welcomes the continued commitment of the United States to the peace process, and we appreciate President Obama's strong reaffirmation of a two-State solution as necessary, just and possible in his speech of 21 March, in which he called for an independent and viable Palestine while emphasizing Israelis' right to insist on safeguarding their security. The United States President also recalled that he had previously proposed principles on the issues of territory and security that he believes can be the basis for talks, and called on Arab States to take steps towards normalized relations with Israel. On 22 March, regarding an important related development and a hopeful signal for the stability of the region, the Secretary-General welcomed the news that the Governments of Israel and Turkey had agreed to restore normal relations between each other and expressed his appreciation for President Obama's role in reaching that positive outcome.

On 18 March, a new Israeli Government was confirmed by the Knesset. In his congratulatory letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Secretary-General stated that he counted on the Prime Minister's commitment to the two-State solution, and he expressed the view that it will be critical this year to achieve substantial results that would strengthen Israel's security, as well as its regional and international standing, and fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians to a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State.

Both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas reiterated their commitment to the two-State solution as essentially the only prospect for the future of Israelis and Palestinians, while they undeniably differ on its terms and on how to attain it. It is incumbent upon us, as the United Nations, and the international community, to help them bridge those differences. Much work lies ahead. We should not underestimate the difficulties, but neither should we belittle the real possibility of overcoming them. It is now time for all of us to come together in concerted action and support a serious international initiative, including through a revitalized Quartet that engages more broadly with key Arab partners and regional and other stakeholders.

Efforts currently under way offer the chance for a new beginning and a renewed push for serious political progress. Therein lies opportunity, but we worry that it will not last if the volatile situation on the ground is not urgently addressed at the same time. Both parties should undertake constructive steps and work to reverse negative trends. In that context, we note that there were no new settlement announcements during the reporting period, and that three structures in settlement outposts were demolished on 18 March. The period also registered fewer incursions by Israeli security forces in the West Bank, including in Area A, as well as a decrease in demolitions of Palestinian structures.

The United Nations position is clear and firm on all the aforementioned issues. It is now our hope that those initial signals that the negative measures on the ground are being reversed will take hold and create a conducive environment for a meaningful political process to take shape.

Overall, it must be said that the levels of violence remained high. Several clashes took place during

protests, including in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners, which caused the death of one Palestinian. The use of rubber-coated bullets by Israeli security forces continues to result in a high number of Palestinian injuries, including those of a 23-year-old man who recently died from wounds suffered when hit on his head by a rubber-coated bullet on 22 February. A third Palestinian died on 15 March after an Israel security forces gas canister had earlier entered his taxi in East Jerusalem. Thirteen Israeli soldiers were also injured.

Tensions also extended to Jerusalem, with multiple clashes taking place at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound, including on 3 and 6 March, and again on 8 March when dozens of Israeli police officers entered the compound and fired stun grenades at Palestinians throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails. The Secretary-General stresses the importance for protests to remain strictly non-violent and for the right to peaceful protest to be fully respected.

Settler violence against Palestinians continued, injuring six. On 12 March, a Palestinian man died of his injuries after he had been run over by a settler vehicle near Salfit on 9 March. Settler attacks on Palestinian orchards resulted in damage to over 590 trees, while stone throwing at Palestinian vehicles in the West Bank resulted in material damage. Israeli security forces arrested a total of nine settlers suspected of assaulting Palestinians in the West Bank.

Israeli security sources have also reported an increase in stone throwing, including against settlers, that injured a total of 10 during the reporting period. Palestinian attacks on settlers included a suspected shooting on 18 March that resulted in injuries to one settler. A suspect in that shooting was arrested by Palestinian security forces on 20 March. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at Israeli vehicles in the West Bank reportedly resulted in a road accident on 14 March that injured six settlers, including a three-year-old, critically. Similar attacks on 6, 11 and 15 March resulted in slight injuries to six Israelis.

We remain concerned about the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody, which we understand was the subject of discussion during this week's high-level meetings. One long-term hunger striker agreed to stop his strike in exchange for being released and deported to Gaza by Israeli authorities on 17 March. Five other prisoners remain on hunger strike, one of whom is reportedly in grave, life-threatening condition. Activities in their support continued in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including a demonstration in front of United Nations offices in Ramallah on 16 March, during which a letter was delivered by the families of prisoners and transmitted to the Secretary-General. The United Nations reiterates that those held in administrative detention without charge should be charged and face trial with judicial guarantees, in accordance with international standards, or be promptly released. We also recall the importance of full adherence by all sides to the 14 May 2012 agreement.

Palestinian security forces have continued working to maintain law and order in the West Bank, in coordination with Israeli security forces and supported by training and equipment from international partners.

I have just come from Brussels, where the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) met on 19 March. Two years after the donors — based on reports from the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — gave their positive assessment of the State readiness of the Palestinian Authority regarding the institutions studied, I highlighted again in my report to the AHLC on behalf of the United Nations the growing disconnect between the widely recognized success of the Palestinian State-building agenda and the continued impasse in the political process. I expressed my concern that State-building achievements could be eroded, given the deteriorating reality on the ground, negative socioeconomic and security trends, and the dire fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority. Those concerns were widely shared by participants in the meeting.

The AHLC underscored the importance for Israel to transfer Palestinian clearance revenues to the Palestinian Authority in a timely, transparent and predictable manner, that the Palestinian Authority continue with structural reforms, including fiscal containment, and that donors provide adequate and predictable assistance to the Palestinian Authority. The general feeling at the AHLC meeting was that it is an illusion that we can preserve the current situation indefinitely. The alternative to progress is sliding back, and a political horizon must be restored without delay.

With regard to other developments during the reporting period, as the Council is aware, the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly his report on the status of Palestine (A/67/738), which reviewed

progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 29 November 2012.

I would also like to highlight the activities of Palestinian women's and human rights organizations in the West Bank and in Gaza to mark International Women's Day on 8 March. Numerous events called attention to the situation of Palestinian women and their demands, including an end of the occupation and the full realization of Palestinian statehood. Unfortunately, it was also in this reporting period that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East had to cancel the annual Gaza marathon because the de facto authorities would not permit the participation of women.

In Gaza, the reporting period saw a serious setback in the implementation of the ceasefire brokered on 21 November. On 21 March, rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel for the second time since the ceasefire. In reaction, Israel rescinded the extension of the fishing limit, bringing it back to three nautical miles, and restricted travel by Palestinians into and out of Gaza. It also closed the Kerem Shalom crossing, bringing the movement of goods to and from Gaza to a halt for the second time after the closure from 27 February to 3 March, following the previous rocket fired.

The United Nations condemned the firing, in line with our consistent position that rocket fire into civilian areas is completely unacceptable. We also urged Israel's continued restraint. It must be very clear to the parties to the understanding reached on 21 November that full adherence to its terms is required by all if work is to continue to solidify the calm, prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza, advance the lifting of the closure and have a chance to fully implement resolution 1860 (2009). The United Nations will continue to support Egypt's important efforts to restore and solidify the calm.

Israeli forces conducted five incursions into Gaza, and a total of six Palestinian civilians were injured by Israeli fire, mostly while attempting to approach the border fence.

There was no progress on Palestinian reconciliation efforts during the reporting period and no meetings between the sides. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission has announced that the updated voter register, including electors from Gaza, will be available on 10 April in spite of Israeli authorities not having authorized the transfer of registration forms from Gaza to Ramallah.

The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has continued to worsen since the Council was briefed by Under-Secretary-General Feltman last month (see S/PV.6926) and by Under-Secretary-General Amos, High Commissioner Guterres and Special Representative Bangura. The continuing pursuit of a military victory by both sides, and their reckless disregard for civilian lives and their protection are of deep concern to the United Nations. Impunity is widespread; human suffering and destruction are pervasive.

As the Secretary-General has said repeatedly, the prospects for a political solution in the Syria will remain slim unless the parties abandon violence and instead commit to a political solution. Limited signals by the parties towards the possible start of a dialogue have so far not materialized. The opposition coalition has elected an interim Prime Minister and will participate in the upcoming summit of the League of Arab States in Doha.

A consensus position of the international community and a common position on the part of the Security Council are critical to a political settlement. Joint Special Representative Brahimi is working tirelessly to achieve that objective. He is counting on the Council's united and meaningful support to his efforts.

In the meantime, the United Nations is doing its utmost to respond to the tragic humanitarian consequences of the conflict, which continue to grow dramatically by the day. Nearly 1.2 million refugees from Syria are seeking safety in neighbouring countries. We are grateful for the generous hospitality shown towards these refugees by regional Governments, which face an increasingly heavy burden on their own economies.

Funding for our humanitarian efforts remains a challenge. Regrettably, only about 20 per cent of what was pledged during the Kuwait pledging conference on 30 January has been received thus far. We continue to appeal for those pledges to be translated into real commitments as soon as possible.

Last week, the Secretary-General announced his decision to conduct an investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. He acted on the request of the Syrian Government, which was soon followed

by requests from the Governments of France and the United Kingdom. He believes that all allegations should be taken seriously. The Secretary-General responded promptly to the Governments concerned, formally informing them of his decision and seeking additional information pertaining to the incidents reported to facilitate the investigation. He also sent a letter to the President of the Security Council. He has been in close contact with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Health Organization. Both organizations have assured the Secretary-General of their full support. The terms of reference for the mission will soon be finalized.

The deteriorating situation in Syria has also affected significantly the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) area of operation, with clashes between Government and opposition forces intensifying in recent days. The continued military activities in the area of separation have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and the Syria and jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries. There was a worrisome incident yesterday in that regard, as heavy machine gunfire from the Bravo side, which reached across the ceasefire line, was answered by the firing of an Israel Defense Forces missile into the area of limitation. UNDOF is still ascertaining the facts with both sides. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations will brief the Council in detail tomorrow on the situation in the Golan, including that most recent incident.

In Lebanon, the resignation of Prime Minister Mikati on 22 March has cast further uncertainty over the political process at a time of increased tensions across the country, most notably in Tripoli. The Secretary-General has called on all the parties in Lebanon to remain united behind the leadership of President Sleiman; to work together with the institutions of the State to maintain calm and stability; to respect Lebanon's policy of disassociation, consistent with their commitment in the Baabda Declaration; and to support the role of the Lebanese Armed Forces in sustaining national unity, sovereignty and security.

Let me recall that only 10 days ago, following the briefing by the Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for Lebanon on 14 March, the Council clearly recognized the fragility of the situation in Lebanon, expressing deep concern at the impact of the Syrian crisis on the country's stability. Since then, there have been more security concerns.

First, on 17 March, four Sunni religious scholars were assaulted in Beirut. The attacks were widely condemned, and the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed to contain ensuing tensions. In the northern city of Tripoli, the Lebanese army deployed in force to contain renewed clashes since 20 March, which had left nine persons, including a Lebanese soldier, dead as of yesterday.

Secondly, on 18 March, Syrian helicopters were reported to have entered Lebanese airspace and fired rockets at two locations close to the north-eastern border town of Aarsal. There were no casualties. The Secretary-General expressed grave concern at the reported strikes, which President Sleiman condemned as an unacceptable violation of Lebanese sovereignty. The Syrian Government has denied the incident. On 21 March, there was a new report of a further rocket that was fired by a Syrian helicopter and landed in the same area. Also on 20 March, there were reports of Syrian shells landing on the outskirts of Al-Qasr in Lebanon's north-eastern region of Hermel.

Meanwhile, the situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations and along the Blue Line remained generally stable, but Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued at a high level. The total strength of the Lebanese army presence in UNIFIL's area of operation is now at approximately two brigades, following new redeployments out of the area to address security challenges elsewhere.

In that context, consultations on a new Government are expected to begin this week. The Secretary-General urges all concerned to engage positively with the President to agree on the way forward through dialogue, in accordance with Lebanon's constitutional requirements and in full respect for the democratic process. As called for by the Council, it remains important for Lebanon's continued stability that all parties make swift progress to ensure that parliamentary elections take place on a consensual basis within the legal and constitutional framework.

Allow me to conclude. We now have an opening to develop a serious and substantial political initiative to achieve the negotiated two-State solution that we all hope for and that will best serve the interests, rights and aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike. The months ahead will not be easy. Both sides will now have to demonstrate political will and determination to make

progress, and the concerted action of the international community, including the region, will be needed to support their efforts. The United Nations is committed to playing its role in shaping the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations in the period ahead.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.